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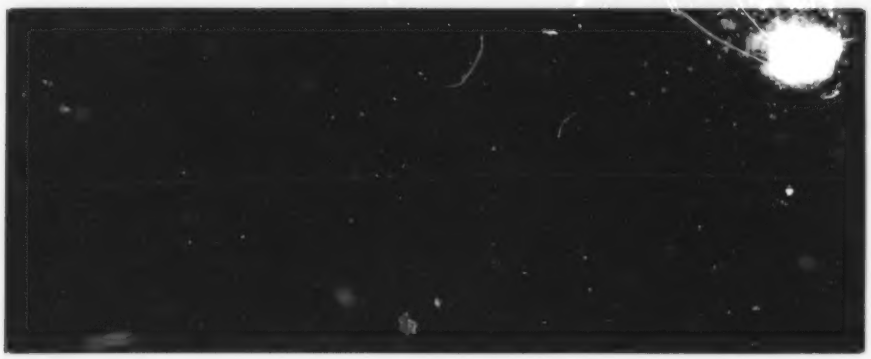

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LINEN FLAX PROJECT - PHASE 1

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LINEN FLAX PROJECT - PHASE 1 -

PROJECT REPORT

MAY, 1989

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LINEN FLAX PROJECT - PHASE 1
FINAL REPORT
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History of the Project

The Linen Flax Project - Phase 1 was undertaken as part of the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture's thrust to diversify the farm economy. A 1987-88 feasibility study had identified linen flax production as viable for Saskatchewan.

In 1988 Alvin Ulrich engaged four farmers to grow linen flax in to test the quality of the Saskatchewan crop. The fibre was to be tested in the laboratory or manually. (Project # D-88-05-0408)

In the fall of 1988 I was called upon to act as a resource and potential co-ordinator for a project to take the flax that was grown in Alvin Ulrich's project and process it to woven products. In my proposal, Linen Flax Project - Phase 1, I intended to research the best techniques and equipment for processing this small quality of the fibre manually. I also wanted to promote this project by encouraging active participation of Saskatchewan spinners and weavers. This would serve two purposes. It would tap their knowledge and experience with the fibre and it would ensure their interest in the future, if a cottage industry became a viable option as part of the diversification venture.

Using the researched information from Phase 1, Linen Flax Project - Phase 2 would have gathered or manufactured the necessary equipment and engaged a number of Saskatchewan people to carry out the process. It would also have included a promotional video with which to market the Saskatchewan product.

The Project

In January, 1989, I started to organize visits to spinning and weaving guilds in Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Regina. While talking to representatives of these groups, I found that the growing and testing of linen flax in Saskatchewan had been conducted earlier and that some of the spinners and weavers had participated in the processing of the fiber into woven items. As a matter of fact, some resistance to "doing that all over again" began to surface.

I contacted Bernie Zuk, (Saskatchewan Research Council), who had been quite active in the earlier activities, read several Department of Agriculture documents which outlined the growing, quality testing and marketing potentials (see Appendix 1) and met with Bernie Zuk and Deanne Belisle (ADDS Secretariat). Finally, in April, 1989, in consultation with Deanne Belisle, I recommended that Linen Project - Phase 1 be discontinued.

Past Linen Activities

Bernie Zuk was involved in the experimentation with linen flax growing, processing and marketing in the late 70's and early 80's through the Flax Growers of Western Canada. Research in growing and retting had been conducted in the three prairie provinces in 1975-1978. Samples had been sent to Europe for testing and favourable results encouraged further research in Saskatchewan. (Linen Flax Three year Western Canadian Production and Feasibility Study, 1981)

The Saskatchewan 1981 crop was sent to Europe for evaluation in 1982 and a delegation of growers accompanied it to observe the testing. The delegation concluded that Saskatchewan flax had potential if the retting procedure could be improved and if a proper market could be established. (Linen Flax Delegation Trip Report France, Belgium, Holland, 1982)

Another recommendation by the Flax Growers describes field and other retting possibilites. However, no conclusive answers for the problem of efficient retting in the prairie climate were reached. (Preliminary Research Report on the Market for Flax (Linen) Fibre)

Bernie Zuk explained that some spinners and weavers in Saskatoon had been involved in processing the fiber and in producing woven articles.

Some Findings

From the reports and discussions that I had, I found a number of pertinent details.

o Manual processing has already been performed in Saskatchewan by Bernie Zuk and some spinners and weavers in Saskatoon in the early 80's.

o There may be new seed varieties since the early 1980's when the variety Natasha was used that would be more adaptable to the prairie growing season and environment.

o Saskatchewan farmers are not fiber-oriented and would require a great deal of encouragement to take linen flax seriously. It may be necessary to devise a promotional campaign and bring in a linen flax grower from outside the province, possibly from Europe.

o A retting procedure appropriate for prairie season length and weather conditions has not yet been discovered.

o Retting of linen flax requires a lot of experience. For Saskatchewan, it may mean that someone with this expertise might have to be brought in to supervise the procedure.

o Prairie Fibre, in Tisdale, Saskatchewan was not interested in making use of the long fibre; rather, the firm was only interested in cutting it up for short fiber uses in paper, etc. To exploit the more valuable long fibre, market potentials must be further explored. For example, an American cotton spinning factory in California could be a possibility.

Linen Project - Phase 1 - Conclusions

Based on the information collected and the discussions with Bernie Zuk and in consultation with Deanne Belisle, I decided not to proceed with Linen Project - Phase 1. It seemed clear that to process the Saskatchewan fiber manually once again was redundant and wasteful.

It was also apparent that if Saskatchewan Agriculture is interested in linen flax as a diversification crop, an overall strategy must be developed. This strategy should consider relevant data from previous research projects and it should include a deliberate and consistent approach to the development of a linen flax industry in Saskatchewan.

Susan Risk, May 1989

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

REPORT ON THE FIBRE FLAX MEETING, SEPT. 2, 1981.

LINEN FLAX Three Year Western Canadian Production and Feasibility Study, Bernie Zuk, Saskatchewan Research Council, February, 1981.

LINEN FLAX Western Canadian Production and Feasibility Study, 1981, Bernie Zuk, Saskatchwan Research Council, 1982.

LINEN FLAX DELEGATION TRIP REPORT France, Belgium, Holland, March 11-19, 1982.

AN APPLICATION TO THE MARKET DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR FUNDING A LINEN FLAX STRAW SHIPMENT TO BELGIUM, Flax Growers of Western Canada, (*1981 or 1982).*

PREHARVEST DESSICATION AS AN AID TO RETTING OF FIBRE FLAX Research Report, Flax Growers Western Canad, 1983-1984.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH REPORT ON THE MARKET FOR FLAX (LINEN) FIBRE, Harvets Foods Ltd., (*?)*

FIBRE FLAX IN SASKATCHEWAN Pauline J. Molder, November 1988

FINAL REPORT CONCERNING FIBER FLAX TRIALS ADF Project No. D-88-05-0408, February, 1989.

Please also note that I have collected a variety of articles about linen flax fibre of interest to spinners, weavers and processers of the fiber. If such information is required in the future, I would be pleased to offer them.